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GERMAN ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROL IN NORTHERN ITALY

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Description

An examination of the nature and extent of German administrative control in northern Italy.

24 July 1944

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GERMAN ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROL IN NORTHERN ITALY

Summary

The German army has controlled virtually all Italy north of the battle-front since September 1943. However, Italy is not officially considered an "occupied" country, and no uniform pattern of control has been imposed. Regions removed from the military front are nominally under the jurisdiction of the puppet Republican Fascist Government; in military zones, legislative and executive powers are apparently wielded by the German commander. A special administration under German Reich Commissars has been instituted in several northern and northeastern Italian provinces, apparently as a prelude to incorporation in the Greater German Reich.

As originally established immediately after the armistice, German control throughout occupied Italy closely approximated outright military government. The broad powers assumed by German military commanders at that time apparently still remain implicitly in effect, though in the near areas most of them are at least nominally delegated to the puppet Fascist government. Establishment of this government under German sponsorship in September-October 1943 enabled the Germans to withdraw to the background, except in military zones.

The Germans still hold ultimate control throughout occupied Italy, however, and exercise direct control wherever necessary. The neo-Fascist government is in no position to resist German encroachments. The only real limitation on German authority derives from widespread resistance and non-cooperation on the part of the general public.

While the Germans apparently reserve the right to intervene in any phase of Italian life, interference in economic matters has been particularly conspicuous. A representative of the Reich Ministry of Armaments and War Production has intervened extensively in the industrial field. Agricultural officers attached to the German army give "advice" on the adaptation of Italian agriculture to the needs of Axis Europe and of the Wehrmacht. German efforts to drain off the reserves of Italian manpower have been carried out both through Italian agencies and by forced requisition. German authorities have constantly intervened in strikes and labor disputes.

The disadvantages of indirect control as exercised in Italy leave open the possibility that the Germans may revert to direct administration. The existing system of German control would probably provide an adequate basis for reestablishment of a full-fledged military regime or establishment of administration by a Reich Commissioner. Whether this drastic step will be taken depends on a balance of the military and political advantages and disadvantages as seen by the Germans. If the puppet government should become a positive liability or an impediment to military operations, it would presumably be liquidated without hesitation.

I. Introduction: Types of German Control in Italy

German representatives have exerted considerable influence on Italian administration ever since Italy's entrance into the war, if not since the formation of the Berlin-Rome Axis. Opinions differ considerably as to the extent of German interference in Italian affairs prior to Italy's collapse in September 1943. It is generally recognized, however, that since the Italian surrender the Germans have enjoyed preponderant control in all parts of Italy not yet liberated by the Allies.

The non-liberated portions of Italy occupy an anomalous position in the hierarchy of European states under German domination. Neither the Germans nor the neo-Fascists admit that Italy is an "occupied" country, and German control has not followed a uniform pattern. The type of control has varied from region to region to fit the military, economic, or administrative needs of the Nazi armed forces.

Three principal types of military and civilian government have been imposed on Europe by the Germans: alliance administration, military administration, and colonial or protectorate administration.[1] Only the first two types appear to have been used to any extent in Italy.

1. "Alliance administration" (in which a native government is guided by advice from the German Foreign Office, while the German occupation armies refrain from interference in political matters) seems to have prevailed, at least in theory, in regions remote from the military front and nominally under the jurisdiction of the Republican Fascist Government.

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1. Cf. German Military Government over Europe, R & A No. 1323.

2. "Military administration" (in which the bulk of the legislative and executive powers are wielded by the military commander) has almost certainly been used in provinces near the fighting front, and probably in many of the rear zones as well.

A third type of administration, involving supervision of the native administration by special German Reich Commissioners, is in use in several provinces of Venezia Tridentina, Veneto, and Venezia Giulia. These provinces have apparently been earmarked for eventual incorporation into the Greater German Reich, and will be considered in a separate report.[1]

II. The First Phase of German Military Control (September 1943)

In the first weeks after Italy's capitulation to the Allies (announced 9 September 1943), German administrative controls were established in a form closely resembling outright military government. Assumption of extensive powers by the military commanders in the Rome and Milan areas enabled the Germans to assert their authority over civil administration and seize direct control of transportation, production, and manpower allocation.

Institution of virtually outright military government by the Germans was announced only four days after the armistice (12 September) in a proclamation by Marshal Kesselring: "Italian territory under my jurisdiction is declared a zone of war, in which German military law is valid....Administrative ministers and judicial authorities are to carry

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1. Cf. German Administration in the Italian Trentino and Venezia Giulia, R & A No. 2208 (in preparation).

on their duty....Italian authorities and civil organizations are responsible to me for public order...."[1] Other decrees of the German commanders ordered the surrender of arms, imposed penalties for sabotage or disobedience, and instituted new regulations for the maintenance of order.

In the Rome area an indirect type of military control was immediately set up with the cooperation of the Italian commander, General Calvi di Bergalo;[2] in northern Italy administrative authority seems to have been divided between the German military commander and the German Consul-General in Milan.[3] A decree issued on 30 September 1943 by the German General in Command of Northern Italy, "in accordance with the powers conferred...by the German Higher Command," emphasized the extent to which the Germans had assumed responsibility throughout the area. It provided (a) that laws and decrees in force up to 8 September should remain in effect, provided they did not prejudice the interests of the German Forces; (b) that all state and communal authorities and public service offices and organizations must resume their activities, maintaining an attitude of loyalty to the German armed forces; (c) that certain salaries and pensions should continue to be paid; (d) that civil lawsuits should remain within the competency of the Italian courts, which, however, were denied jurisdiction over crimes not committed by inhabitants of the country, or committed "against the decrees or any other regulation

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1. FCC: Southern European Analysis, 24 September 1943.
2. Rome radio, 13 September 1943 (News Digest #1239); Transocean, 6 October 1943 (News Digest #1259).
3. Svenska Dagbladet, 17 September 1943 (News Digest #1239)

issued for the safeguarding of the German Armed Forces"; (e) that in case any public service authority, office, or organization was unable to continue functioning, the prefect should make other arrangements for the performance of its duties; (f) that "the very closest collaboration" should prevail between local authorities (and public service offices in their jurisdiction) and the German military Garrison Commands, who were to give them "the necessary instructions and guidance."[1]

Although this decree has been lost to sight in the subsequent flood of legislation by the Republican Fascist Government, its essential provisions still seem to be in effect as the underlying basis of administrative arrangements in northern Italy. In particular, the provision for collaboration between the local authorities and the German garrison still seems to be generally observed.

III. Italian Puppet Rule (October 1943 to Date)

While the German army was establishing de facto control throughout occupied Italy, an Italian puppet regime nominally headed by Mussolini was being thrown together under German sponsorship. Formation of an Italian Fascist council of ministers was announced on 22 September, and formal installation of the new "Fascist Republican State" followed one week later. A Fascist Party assembly held at Verona on 15 November officially declared the fall of the monarchy and proclaimed the "Social Republic" headed by Mussolini.[2]

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1. FCC: Daily, 1 October 1943.
2. The Italian Social Republic, R & A No. 1740, pp. 2-3.

As this neo-Fascist state consolidated its position, the German occupation authorities were able to withdraw to the background, exercising control to an increasing extent through native Italian authorities and organizations. Many of the more unpopular features of government, such as policing, were shifted primarily to the neo-Fascist government. Thus the German military leaders were able to disclaim responsibility for food shortages, labor difficulties, monetary inflation, and other wartime inconveniences. In certain cases they were even able to intervene as moderators between the Italian people and the harsh and incompetent Mussolini government At the same time German civil officials tended to replace the military in guiding the actions of the Italian authorities.

A Transocean dispatch of 31 October 1943 clearly described this process: "German policy is aimed at re-establishing systematically and step by step the sovereignty of the Fascist Republican Government in every field. It is remarked in Rome, in this connection, that the chaotic situation which Mussolini's Government found when it returned forced the German military authorities, for the time being, to deal with the question of order and administration themselves. This also explains the number of drastic measures, such as the confiscation of estates and large farms and the radical economic measures, which the German military authorities had to take to prevent the destruction of property and acts of sabotage. It is emphasized in Rome that all these measures will be abolished step by step as the Italian administration begins to function again....It is particularly emphasized that the courts, the financial authorities, taxation offices and the entire school and hygienic systems are already under the exclusive control of the Italian Government. The most convincing

indication that developments are taking this course is the restoration of the Italian Armed Forces, the Militia and the Police. The liaison authority between the German Armed Forces and the Italian Government, it is also stressed, is not the German High Command in Italy, but the Reich plenipotentiary for Italy, Minister Rudolf von Rahn, and the German Military Attache."[1]

Notwithstanding the Germans' official transfer of responsibility to their Fascist allies, it is clear that they have continued to hold ultimate control throughout occupied Italy and to exercise direct control wherever necessary. So far as is known, there has been no explicit delimitation of authority as between Germans and Fascists. However, the Germans seem to have tacitly reserved the right to intervene in all matters affecting the welfare of the German armed forces and war effort. This right enables them to assert their influence in practically any direction. For example, there appears to be no limitation on Gestapo operations in Italy, and German authorities have participated in the settlement of nearly all strikes and labor disturbances since the armistice.

Sources interested in maintaining the fiction of Italian independence have stated that the Germans are not entitled to conscript Italian labor for service in the Reich, but may only call for volunteers; similarly, the neo-Fascist government has officially declared that no Italian in Italy may be sentenced by any non-Italian court. However, there is no evidence that the Germans feel themselves limited by any such

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1. Transocean, 21 October 1943 (News Digest #1279).

statement, made either by the neo-Fascists or by themselves. The neo-Fascist government, which owes its very existence to the presence of the Nazi armed forces, is in no position to resist German encroachments. The only real limitations on Nazi control derive from the frequent refusal of the Italians themselves to collaborate with the neo-Fascists and their German overlords.

Furthermore, the weakness and incompetence of the Fascist central authority has forced the local German military commanders to play an active administrative role. Numerous reports have described the tendency of Fascist local authorities to lean on the nearest German garrison commander for advice and aid, and on all important problems to deal directly with the German military rather than to consult the puppet government.[1]

IV. German Economic Intervention

More conspicuous than the action of German military commanders has been that of special German representatives and missions in the economic field. Such special German agents generally represent a ministry or official agency of the Nazi government, and are frequently given military rank to facilitate their work. They appear ordinarily to work through Italian government agencies and bureaus, although apparently not directly attached to them.

A. Industry: the German Ministry of Armaments and War Production

As early as 25 September 1943 the German Minister of Armaments and War Production (Albert Speer) appointed a special representative for Italy,

1. E.g., Svenska Dagbladet, 9 December 1943 (News Digest #1314).

with the general mission of gearing Italian industry to German wartime needs. Speer's delegate, Colonel Aschoff, established headquarters at Milan and immediately issued a series of decrees governing production and distribution in a number of important industries.[1] In addition, he conducted conversations with the representatives of several Italian economic organizations, aimed at providing "the raw materials which are necessary -- through a rational utilization of productive capacity and suitable regulation of commercial exchanges -- for the gradual adaptation of Italian economy to the conditions demanded by the present phase of the war, bearing in mind the need to make sure that everyone will be supplied with work and equitable wages."[2] More recently these functions appear to have been taken over in large part by Italian agencies.

B. Agriculture

German military occupation has brought with it German control and "coordination" of Italian agriculture in the interests of Axis Europe as a whole. Following upon various more or less haphazard inventories and requisitions of farm animals and products,[3] a systematic registration of all cattle in the occupied region was undertaken in December 1943. At

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1. Agence Télégraphique Suisse, 25 September 1943 (News Digest #1250); Transocean, 14 October 1943 (News Digest #1265); Corriere della Sera, 9 October 1943 (News Digest #1268); Corriere della Sera, 15 October 1943 (News Digest #1274).
2. Ibid.
3. Neue Zuercher Zeitung, 29 October 1943 (Press Intell. Cable); Rome radio, 6 October 1943 (FCC: Ticker).

this time Baron von Elk, identified as Agricultural Administrator of the Rhineland Province, was appointed "chief of the agricultural section of the German Military Administration[1] in northern Italy." One agricultural expert was assigned to each province to work under his orders.[2]

A German newspaper in March 1944 revealed the presence in Italy of a small number of German Landwirtschaftsfuehrer (agricultural leaders), attached to the army with officers' rank, whose function was to"consult" with Italian agricultural officials and secure fulfillment of the requirements of European agriculture as a whole and especially those of the German army. These officials are theoretically not authorized to give orders, interfere in administration, or relieve the "sovereign Italian state" of its responsibilities. Nevertheless it would appear that their "advice" is intended to have binding force.[3]

C. Manpower

German interest in capturing the reserves of Italian manpower has been one of the main influences on Italian social life since the armistice. Strenuous efforts to recruit Italian labor for the Reich have coincided, and frequently competed, with attempts to regulate the allocation of manpower within Italy itself. The Todt Organization opened offices in all the large cities of Italy in October 1943, and German labor exchanges

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1. This agency, to which there have been occasional references (cf. Corriere della Sera, 23 November 1943, quoted in News Digest #1308), does not appear to have any overall administrative functions comparable to those of the Allied Military Government or the Allied Control Commission in southern Italy.
2. FCC: Southern European Analysis, 16 December 1943.
3. Voelkischer Beobachter, 5 March 1944; cf. Aftontidningen, 28 April 1944 (News Digest #1435).

were set up to hire men for work in Italy or in the Reich. Although the Germans have frequently resorted to forced requisitions and kidnaping of manpower for work in Germany,[1] they have generally preferred to work through Italian agencies such as the "National Commissariat of Labor" established in December 1943 to control labor conditions, salaries, and recruitment and movement of manpower.[2]

D. Labor

Continued unrest in the industrial centers of Northern Italy has forced the Germans to interfere repeatedly in the field of labor relations. German intervention has been noted in connection with almost all north Italian strikes and labor disturbances since September 1943.[3] The general tendency of German authorities has been to pose as friends of Italian labor and protectors of Italian workers against Fascist exactions. Thus, the personnel of factories working for the German war effort has frequently been exempted from military drafts and granted other concessions, and the Germans appear to have been instrumental in securing wage increases on a large scale.

German intervention in its most conspicuous form occurred in connection with the strikes which tied up much of the industry of Milan, Turin, and Genoa during the second half of November 1943. A special

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1. Aftontidningen, 13 May 1944 (News Digest #1449).
2. FCC: Southern European Analysis, 16 December 1943; cf. ibid., 22 October 1943.
3. Strikes and Labor Disturbances in Northern Italy since the Armistice, R & A No. 2071 (in preparation).

delegation was sent to northern Italy under SS Major General Georg Zimmermann, with the mission of "assuring peace and order by every means" and assisting the Italian authorities "in obtaining an improvement in the food situation chiefly as it affects the workers."[1] Establishing headquarters in Turin, General Zimmermann and his deputy, General Tensfeld, conferred both with Fascist officials and with groups of workers on means of improving working conditions in the major industrial cities.[2] As a result, large-scale ration increases were ordered and wages were increased up to 30 percent.[3] Zimmermann also seems to have been instrumental in setting up the National Commissariat of Labor as an overall Italian agency for the settlement of labor problems.[4]

V. Conclusion

Although the Germans ultimately control the exercise of all governmental functions in Italy, they have preferred thus far to leave as much administrative responsibility as possible in Italian hands. This policy has presumably resulted in a saving of German administrative personnel, as well as enabling the Germans to keep up the fiction of Italian independence.

The method of indirect control has had obvious inconveniences, resulting mainly from the unpopularity and inefficiency of the Italian Fascist administration. From time to time there have been reports that the German

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1. Gazzetta del Popolo, 2 December 1943 (News Digest #1313).
2. Aftontidningen, 21 December 1943 (News Digest #1324).
3. Strikes and Labor Disturbances in Northern Italy since the Armistice, R & A No. 2071 (in preparation).
4. FCC: Southern European Analysis, 16 December 1943.

military wished to do away with the puppet government and administer the country by direct methods. Such reports have been especially frequent since the German retreat north of Rome. If the Germans should at any time decide to abandon the pretense of Italian rule, their existing system of control would probably provide an adequate framework for the institution of direct administration. Such an administration might follow either the original pattern of military control, as established after the armistice, or the system of administration by a Reich Commissioner which has been used in the Trentino and Venezia Giulia (a similar system was instituted in Belgium and northern France in July 1944). The choice between these two systems would probably be determined mainly by the play of political forces within Germany (army vs. party) rather than by local considerations.

Whether the Germans will take the drastic step of eliminating the puppet government naturally depends on a balance of the military and political advantages and disadvantages. So long as the political and practical advantages of indirect rule are considered to outweigh its military inconveniences, the present system or some variant of it will doubtless be maintained. However, if the puppet government should at any time become a positive liability or an impediment to military operations, it would presumably be liquidated without hesitation.